Relief to mobile phone users

225. SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that opening up of telecom sector and entry of private players in the field has resulted in the mobile phone users getting a better deal in terms of rent, call tariff and value added service;

(b) whether it is also a fact that in relation to mobile phone users, the fixed telephone users, who are mostly from the low and middle class, feel ignored and discriminated, because their rental, call rates and phone service have been the same; and

(c) whether Government propose to reduce the rental and call rates further in respect of fixed lines and by when?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) Sir, Cellular Mobile Telephone Service (CMTS) in India was initially started only by the private companies beginning in the year 1995 in Metro cities and later in rest of the country. Subsequently, the service was started by Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited and only recently by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL). One additional private operator was also issued licences in most parts of the country in September/October, 2001 and most of them have also started their services. Due to increased competition in the cellular service sector, the tariffs for the service have been coming down.

(b) In relation to the mobile subscribers, the fixed line users are not ignored or discriminated, as can be seen from the following:

(i) The latest ISD (International Subscriber Dialling) and STD (Subscriber Trunk Dialling) tariffs prescribed by Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) are equally applicable to mobile and fixed line telephones.

(ii) The fixed telephone rentals are generally lower than those on mobile telephones.

(iii) There are no additional airtime charges on fixed lines.

(iv) For subscribers of fixed lines in rural areas, the Charges are lower than those in urban areas. No such concession is given in the case of mobile telephones.

(v) STD and ISD tariffs have greatly decreased due to TRAI's decisions and competition between service providers.

(c) The Government no longer fixes tariffs for telephones services. The power of fixing tariffs for various telecom services is now mandated to TRAI under the TRAI Act, and the TRAI along with the competition between service providers now determine the tariff.

V.P.T. facility by BSNL

226. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, a Public Sector Enterprise, is being entrusted the responsibility of providing Village Public Telephone facility throughout the country;

(b) if so, the number of village in the country which would be provided with this facility;

(c) whether a time-frame has been chalked out for this task; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI SUMITRA MAHAJAN): (a) to (d) Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. (BSNL) is providing the Village Public Telephones (VPTs) throughout the country except in those to be provided by private Basic Service Operators and BSNL has accordingly drawn up plans to provide VPTs in the remaining 34,469 villages of its share by 2003-2004.

Licenses to private companies for deployment of village phones

227. SHRI C. O. POULOSE:
SHRI V. V. RAGHAVAN:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the private basic phone companies were awarded